

Eggplant and Tomato Pasta

Eggplant and Tomato Pasta or Pasta Alla Norma as it's traditionally known, is one dish I can't get enough of. Strips of sauteed eggplant are tossed with cherry tomatoes, garlic and a touch of dried red chili flakes just to spice things up a little. It's a simple, homely meal, just the type I like to make!

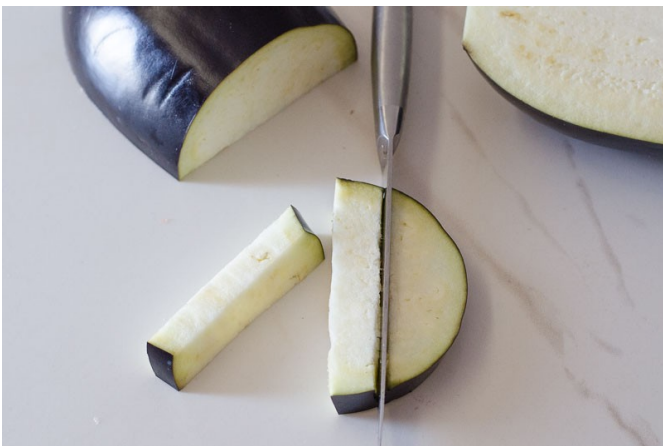


This Sicilian delight has been a hit in my household for quite some time for a number of reasons. Let's start with how quick and easy it is to put together. I'm talking 30 minutes. And most of the time I already have the necessary ingredients in the fridge. That's convenience for you!

Healthy? Definitely! Essentially a vegetarian dish using fresh ingredients; eggplant (although eggplant is technically a fruit) and plump cherry tomatoes. How fresh and juicy do they look in the pan? I like to leave a few with their stalks on just for effect. You could use canned tomatoes as an alternative if you so desire (see note 1).

I love eggplant!! Picking good eggplant can be a little tricky. I rarely get caught out, but there has been a few times when I have brought home eggplant, sliced them open only to find them brown and fluffy on the inside. The only thing to do is throw them away as they will more than likely be bitter.

As a rule, I select eggplant that have tight skin and are very shiny. Avoid the spongy looking ones with brown marks. It does pay to be picky when it comes to eggplant.





I recommend you try this dish for its simplicity and combination of pure flavours.

It really holds its own among other good pasta dishes.

Danielle

Total time: 30 mins Servings: 2 hungry people (recipe can be easily doubled)

Ingredients

- 1 large eggplant (aubergine)
- 500 g / 1 lb cherry tomatoes (note 1)
- 3 garlic cloves, grated
- 180 g / 6 oz spaghetti
- 1 tsp dried red chili flakes
- olive oil (roughly 1/2 cup)
- salt, pepper

- **optional:** chopped parsley or basil leaves (the basil leaves are more traditional) (note 2)
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Instructions

1. Cut eggplant into strips of 1.5 cm / 1/2 " thickness (see photo). Place in a colander and sprinkle with salt.
 2. Allow to stand for 30 mins. The eggplant strips will release moisture.
 3. Dry the eggplant strips with kitchen paper or a dry tea-towel.
 4. Saute strips in 2 batches (to avoid overcrowding in pan) using 2 – 3 tbsp of olive oil per batch over moderate – high heat until lightly golden (5 -7 mins per batch). Transfer to a plate.
 5. Turn down heat to moderate low. Add 2 – 3 tbsp of olive oil to the same pan and add the garlic and dried red chili flakes. Saute for 1 min.
 6. Begin boiling the pasta until soft enough to eat but not mushy (see packet instructions as a guide).
 7. Add the cherry tomatoes to the pan with the garlic and chili flakes. Using a spatula or fork, press down on the tomatoes so they release their juices. Turn heat up to moderate – high, stirring occasionally until the tomatoes start breaking down (5 – 7 mins).
 8. Turn off the heat. Add the eggplant to the tomatoes. Stir through gently.
 9. Add the pasta and toss to combine. Sprinkle with chopped parsley or basil leaves.
 10. Like most pasta dishes, you have to serve this straight away. Don't forget the garlic bread!
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Notes

1. A 400 g/ 14 oz can of cherry tomatoes can be substituted for the fresh tomatoes. Reserve some of the cooking water from the pasta in case you want to thin down the sauce.
2. Stir through fresh basil leaves at the **end** of the cooking process. My research tells me that regional differences account for what type of cheese (if any) is grated over the top. While I have opted for no cheese, you can use salted ricotta (I have never tried it myself) or parmesan. I have even seen fetta sprinkled on top.